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# WRIT 121.H1: Introduction to Technical Writing - Hamilton

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# WRIT 121: INTRODUCTION TO TECHNICAL WRITING

## Course Syllabus

**Instructor:** Matthew Kaler

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### Required Texts:

*Professional and Technical Writing Strategies*  
VanAlstyne, custom edition  
*Little, Brown Compact Handbook*,  
Jane E. Aaron, ninth edition

**Class Dates and Location:** This 15-week course runs from August 26-December 4. The class meets Tuesday/Thursday from 4:10-5:30 pm at BC in Room 2. Students will be responsible for completing course assignments online through Moodle or by submission in class.

**Office Hours:** You can schedule an appointment with me in class or by email to meet in person or via Skype. I will respond to all emails within a 48 hour period, Monday-Friday.

### Course Objectives:

1. Introduction to constructed text that accurately communicates technical information using appropriate technical writing constructs, document design, and graphic placement within technical formats.
2. An awareness of both academic and technical writing genres and how the writing situation shapes the document.
3. Introduction to a writing process that includes revision and editing.
4. Introduction to *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* as a tool to gain control of punctuation, grammar, syntax, and spelling.

### Workload and Expectations Overview:

This course focuses on the kind of writing that fills manuals—description, instruction, and analysis—as well as public science writing. We will read and discuss technical documents and materials about technical writing. There is a special focus on audience as evidenced in this quote from the Society for Technical Communicator's Code of Ethics: Technical writers "satisfy the audience's need for information, not the writer's own need for self-expression." This kind of writing is all about the reader.

All writing classes address **writing conventions** at some point. I address punctuation problems through clauses and basic sentence structure that leads to a working knowledge of the *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*, a tool you take with you to use in other classes. It is appropriate to line edit technical documents, so this can be a good opportunity to hone your editing skills.

All major papers will include a revision day where we can work the **writing process** as we write these papers to better understand how we compose, and to learn once again that there is nothing neat and tidy about writing and revising. In technical writing with the audience so important, we need feedback and must adjust our documents continually.

After completing the technical/professional papers and assignments, students will be expected to apply their knowledge of strong technical text, graphic placement, and design features within all other assignments, especially the public science piece.

There are **readings** both in Moodle and your text that will require your critical reading skills and are part of the daily assignments. Your second major assignment draws from the readings in part 2 of your text and requires you to **define what credible writing in cyberspace is** and how a reader determines what is credible.

The **in-class projects** are designed to help build a writing community. We never write alone and technical writing especially needs input from others. We often use small groups to help each other think through writing problems and acquire ideas from each other.

There is a **public science paper** that gives you an opportunity to explore a subject and present information in a technical style. Lastly, there will be an opportunity to **synthesize your writing knowledge in a self-reflective final**, both the already acquired and the new, and to articulate a new understanding of writing that is broader and more inclusive. It is your opportunity to build bridges between all of your writing classes.

## Grading Scale:

94-100 A	87-89 B+	77-79 C+
93-90 A-	86-83 B	76-73 C
	82-80 B-	72-70 C-

## Registration

If you miss the first two class meetings (and haven't communicated with me in advance about extenuating circumstances), you need to drop the course on Cyberbear and enroll another semester. The reason for this policy is that important groundwork for the semester is put in place in the first couple of class meetings, and students without that foundational framework are better served by taking the course when they can give it the attention it deserves. Note: Important dates can be found on Cyberbear.

## Attendance

Attendance is an expectation. Students who do not attend class do not perform as well as students who do attend class.

### First, why it matters

A writing course is unlike most of the classes you will take while at the University of Montana. In other classes, there will be a specific amount of well-defined material to be covered, and lecturing is the most common mode for distributing that information. Although your instructor will give you information and guide you as you develop effective writing strategies and practices, becoming a better writer does not happen from listening to lectures. "Learning" in this course takes place mainly through engagement and inquiry--that means you will be participating in many class discussions and group-related activities. You will not very often find yourself sitting in class taking notes.

Personal situations and required university or professional events may arise that, on a rare occasion, make it impossible for you to be in class. Remember, however, that's why three (3) absences are allowed; please reserve those for *exceptional circumstances*. Classes missed by those enrolling later than day one will count toward your three allowed absences. If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class. **Make sure you talk with your instructor in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.**

### The Policy

You are allotted 3 "free"/"unexcused" absences: you do not need permission, and I don't need an explanation. Use these three wisely. More than three absences will compromise your grade.

4th "unexcused" absence: final grade drops one letter grade; 5th absence: final grade drops two letter grades, and so on. More than 6 "unexcused" absences will result in failure.

Why the policy? Without attending class, you cannot participate as a member of a learning community, and you cannot be a writer and collaborator with your peers. Participation includes taking part in class discussions, asking questions, and contributing to the classroom experience. Of course, this includes doing the required reading and writing assignments.

### Excused Absences

What warrants an excused absence? A death in the family, a court or legal issue (for example: jury duty, parole meeting, court date, incarceration), an appointment for public benefits or entitlements that cannot be scheduled at any other time, or a severe health issue. What is a severe health issue? Being contagious (with flu or pink eye, for example), an incident that requires a visit to the emergency room or hospitalization, or having a medical condition requiring an immediate appointment that cannot be scheduled at any other day/time. Upon returning to class, the student must show documentation regarding the exact date of the absence (except in the case of family death). Absences due to a severe health issue can be excused only if, upon returning, the student brings a signed note from his or her attending health care provider (physician or RN, not a member of the secretarial staff) stating that the student was ill the

day of the absence and sought medical attention. The note must include: the exact date of class missed and the actual signature of the attending physician or RN and his/her contact information.

### **How to be absent**

If you must be absent for a class, email one of your classmates, (even if you don't know them very well) asking him/her to pick up missed handouts, announcements and homework assignments. Also ask if you can copy his/her notes. **You are responsible for all missed material and the homework assigned during your absence.** You may make an appointment with me to go over notes that you got from a classmate to see if they are complete. Unless we have previously agreed to some other arrangement, all assignments are due on the announced due dates regardless of your class presence.

### **Other Course Policies**

There will be no opportunity to "make-up" tests, quizzes or in-class assignments that are not turned-in during the designated class period. This make-up policy is applied at the discretion of the Instructor.

### **Late Paper Policy**

Papers turned in after their due date will be deducted one letter grade per day until received. I also reserve the right not to accept any late work after its due date.

### **Late Paper Extensions**

Extensions on assignment due dates will only be granted for good reason (I reserve the right to determine this) and if you contact me prior to the due date. No extensions will be granted if you fail to communicate any issues with me prior to the assignment due date.

### **E-mail Accounts and Moodle**

You will need a UMConnect account. I often send information via email and you are welcome to pose questions to the whole class regarding assignments. **You are responsible for checking your email and our course on Moodle EVERY DAY.**

### **Assignment Submission Format**

Format of all works produced will depend upon the specific assignment. All final drafts must be word-processed. Do not put writing assignments in folders or binders; staple them in the upper, left hand corner. Back up everything for your own protection.

Plagiarism of any sort will result in a course grade of F. The U of M's student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as "representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own." Students may be asked for their research or sources at any time.

### **Civility Clause**

I will tolerate neither disruptive language nor disruptive behavior. Disruptive language includes, but is not limited to, violent and/or belligerent and/or insulting remarks, including sexist, racist, homophobic or anti-ethnic slurs, bigotry, and disparaging commentary, either spoken or written (offensive slang is included in this category).

While I do not disagree that you each have a right to your own opinions, inflammatory language founded in ignorance or hate is unacceptable and will be dealt with immediately.

Disruptive behavior includes the use of cell phones, pagers or any other form of electronic communication during the class session (e-mail, web-browsing). Disruptive behavior also includes whispering or talking when another member of the class is speaking or engaged in relevant conversation (remember that I am a member of this class as well). This classroom functions on the premise of respect, and you will be asked to leave the classroom and a formal process of Student Conduct Code violation will be pursued, if you violate any part of this statement on civility. **Remember that you will need to send me an e-mail that indicates you have read and understand this policy before Week Two of class.**

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are provided accommodations upon presenting the proper verification. Come see me.

**Communication:** I am available to speak with you and answer questions after class, by scheduled appointment in person at the BC (or via Skype), and through email. By University policy, all email communication must be conducted to my UM email account through your UM email account. I will only communicate with registered members of this course.

I am available to discuss any problems or needs for accommodation, but you need to come and talk to me beforehand. That includes letting me know if you have children or any obligations outside of class that will affect your presence in the class.

**Disclaimer**

Please be advised that I reserve the right to change and/or modify any of the aforementioned points within this Syllabus, details of the Papers and Projects, Important Due Dates, and the course Weekly Plans. If I do, I will verbally announce any changes in class as well as post them to Moodle.